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School of Medicine
Department of Microbiology, RD-85

February 26, 1973

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Department of Genetics
Stanford University School of Medicine
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Professor Lederberg,

Thank you for your prompt reply to my inquiry. I was able to locate the critical references you sent me, including the article in "Genetics in the 20th Century", where I had originally read about your constitutive mutants. I was able to incorporate a discussion of the experiment in a lecture sequence given in an undergraduate course in microbial physiology. The neolactose experiment seemed significant to me not only for historical reasons, but also because of the beauty of the experimental design.

The experiment was first brought to my attention by my advisor, Dr. Howard Douglas, who had discussed it in several of his classes over the past few years. However, we managed to misplace our original reference, and attempted to relocate it first by referring to the literature, starting with the 1961 operon papers. After failing there, I consulted a number of my professors and colleagues in the departments of Microbiology and Genetics. I was surprised to find that it was widely believed that the first lac constitutive mutants were isolated at the Pasteur Institute. It is now clear to me how these misconceptions arose, especially among younger scientists, for, as you doubtless know, references to your earlier work can be found only after a rather tortuous journey through the stacks. The 1961 reviews clearly failed to adequately "review".

I have sent Philip Schaffner a copy of your letter to me, plus a letter of explanation describing the circumstances which prompted me to phone you. I am afraid that I had little to offer him but a history of my own ignorance, and the suggestion from my limited sampling that this ignorance about the constitutive mutants might be quite widespread among otherwise well-informed scientists.

Again, I do appreciate your attention to my inquiry.

Sincerely,

Olen M. Kew

Olen M. Kew
Graduate Student

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